AVERAGE IS 8.4 DAYS

Length of Stay Pushes Hospital Costs Up

By DEAD C. MILLER

NEW YORK (UPI)—If the average length of a hospital stay were reduced by only a day Americans would save $1.7 billion per year, according to the Health Insurance Institute of New York.

The average hospitalization today runs 8.4 days and is rising. Aside from being costly to patients, this creates manpower shortages which are reflected in $100 per day rates at some quality hospitals.

Health care officials are turning more and more to computers to unloosen the human logjams at their doorsteps. And they see a full scale computerized revolution in health care procedures in the decade of the '70s. Computers are envisioned as ever-present, never-tiring nurses and doctors. They are expected to take over even critical patient care and surgical monitoring.

Techniques Developed

Techniques already have been developed to machine process electrocardiograms, respiratory curves and blood pressure curves. Medical histories and most laboratory tests are being processed in some centers.

Sharp changes in hospital admissions and length of stay are predicted for the '70s. Patients now hospitalized for routine diagnostic tests will be handled as outpatients in an automated diagnostic process, freeing hospitals for emergency cases. And rapid automated test analyses will shorten the stay of persons who must go to a hospital for testing, say the experts.

An embryonic automated medical system already is in existence. It's the model system established by the U.S. Public Health Service's Medical Systems Development Laboratory (MSDL) in Washington, D.C. An analog system, it transmits data by standard telephone, either directly on line to the computer or to a centrally located recording station.

Feed Data From Groups

The satellites, in Columbia, Mo., and Hartford, Conn., feed data from user groups such as hospitals, industrial organizations, private practitioners, state health departments and others. Electrocardiograms and sprograms from over 40 user groups, for instance, can be processed at the rate of more than 4,500 per month.

To date most hospitals with computers use them mainly for billing, ordering and payroll.

Eventually, say the health care experts, a network of computers using telephone communications will make computer analysis available anywhere on a routine basis—to hospitals, to doctors' office, possibly even to the patient's own office.

Lived on Pillar

Saint Simeon Stylites, who became the spiritual guide of a great number of pilgrims, lived on top of a stone pillar for some 30 years. He believed that the severity of his life was necessary to call attention to the evil habits of the people of his time.

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